

Christmas 12.25.24

You might be surprised to learn that there is no mention in the bible of an Innkeeper as the story of Jesus' birth is told. The only reference we have to that part of the story is told in Luke's gospel. In chapter 2, St. Luke offers this description: **there was no room for them in the inn**. That's it. Nothing more.

We've certainly imagined what the Innkeeper would have been like. Some Christmas plays depict him as a mean, callous man who thinks nothing of turning away the Holy Family. Others see him as a guilty, shame-filled individual who meekly directs the Holy Family to a stable – a cave where animals find shelter from the cold and the threat of attack from wild beasts. We know Jesus was born in a stable or cave because the scriptures tell us Mary lays the baby in a manger, which is a feeding trough for animals.

While not specifically spoken about in the scriptures, I imagine the Innkeeper to be someone who is kind and quite resourceful. He is sensitive to Mary and Joseph's plight. They are migrants who have no place to stay, even as Mary is about to give birth to her baby. The culture of the time would usually lead people to be mistrustful of anyone who wasn't family and wasn't from their neighborhood. Families cared for each other. They dismissed everyone else who wasn't an immediate member of the family.

Instead of being dismissive, the Innkeeper thought of a solution. He must have known about the cave, the stable. Maybe he kept his own animals there. Maybe he played there as a boy. But what he had or what he knew about, he was ready and willing to share it with these strangers. It was a kind gesture. And it was ingenious. I'd like to think the Holy Spirit made him truly wise that night. Knowing that there would be no rooms available in his town because of all those who had traveled there to be counted in the Roman census, the Innkeeper directed them to a safe shelter. He didn't blow them off. He didn't slam the door on them. He immediately came to their aid.

At Christmas, we are often hyper-focused on what this day means for **US**. What presents will I get? Will my family get along? But the real spirit of this day and every day that follows the birth of Jesus is summed up in the questions, what have **I BECOME** as a result of Jesus being born? What do I do for others because of how Christ's birth - as well as his suffering, death, and resurrection - have touched me in a profound and personal way?

A few weeks ago, our Home and School Association sponsored a **Breakfast With Santa**. It's a huge event – with great food, fun activities, and of course, a chance to speak with the Big Man, Santa. Before the children approach Santa, they can spend some time writing out a few things – their name, age, how they have been good this year, and what they would like to ask for. I'm so grateful that Santa shared a few of those notes with me. Most of the letters contained the usual list of what the boys and girls wanted for Christmas. But three of them said this:

- **I want toys, so I can give them to the homeless**
- **I want all the poor to have money and a home**
- **I want more of us to forgive, and to be filled with love and faith**

These letters made my day. They also reminded me in a profound way that so many of our children get what's Christ's birth means for us. How it changes us. And is a force for helping us to change the world.

At Christmas time, we often hear the song **The Little Drummer Boy**. It is a relatively contemporary song, when we compare it to other Christmas carols or songs written 100 or more years ago. A little trivia about the song: it was first recorded by the von Trapp Family – yes, the family we know from the **Sound of Music**. The second verse of the song goes something like this:

Little baby, pa rum pum pum um
I am a poor boy too
I have no gift to bring
That's fit to give a King,
Shall I play for you, pa rum pum pum
On my drum?

Mary nodded, pa rum pum pum pum
The ox and lamb kept time
I played my drum for Him
I played my best for Him
Then He smiled at me, pa rum pum pum pum
Me and my drum.

The song ***The Little Drummer Boy*** is timeless and touches our hearts because it reminds us that even the little we have can make a world of difference...just as the seemingly insignificant cave or stable which the Innkeeper offered to Mary and Joseph made all the difference to the Holy Family. It became a place where our Savior was born. It became the home where the Holy Family welcomed shepherds – individuals who weren't trusted by the rest of society. It became the place where foreigners like the Magi were embraced, when the rest of the world would have turned them away out of mistrust and fear.

I am fond of saying that our God is a God of abundance. He is not stingy with his love, mercy, and grace. He takes the little bit we have and offer, turning it into abundant blessings for others. That is the message of this season. And it is the blessing we receive when we decide to intentionally share Christ with others.

When I was a boy, we lived two houses away from a 90-year-old woman. She never married and had no family. Every once in a while, my brothers and I looked in on her at my Mom's request. It was sometimes painful visiting her because she always wanted to talk. Being a former teacher, she always offered some instruction as well – and we got enough of that at school. And her house was hot, really hot. She never ran her air conditioning.

One year we asked her to join us for Christmas dinner. I'm guessing that my brothers and I were hoping she wouldn't come. It would mean entertaining her and having to listen to another lesson from her – but we reluctantly asked her anyway. She declined but asked only that we bring some dinner to her home. When we did, I never saw anyone smile like she did. It was like we brought her a \$1 million. She said no one had ever done that for her before and it was the best Christmas gift she had received in a long time.

I mentioned at the beginning of these remarks that the scriptures don't tell us anything about the Innkeeper the night Jesus was born. It is up to us to imagine what he was like and what he did or didn't do. But more importantly, Christmas reminds us that we have the ability and perhaps the responsibility to write the narrative about what kind of Innkeeper **WE** would be. Are we kind to others, even when we find them to be a challenge? Do we use the gifts God gives to us – like wisdom and knowledge – to make this world better for others? Do we ask for more and more for ourselves, or do we use what we have to alleviate the suffering and loneliness of others?

Today and every day, Christ is knocking at the door of heart. Will we answer him? And If we do welcome him, will the joy he brings us be the gift we generously offer to others? God is patiently waiting to see what Innkeeper story you will write about yourself. And he is anxiously wanting to take the little you offer him and turn it into something abundant for others. May the love, peace, joy, and new life we receive from Christ at Christmas be what we generously share with others all our days.

Merry Christmas!